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Biden vows he, Manchin will 'get something done' on \$2T bill

By LISA MASCARO and FARNOUSH AMIRI

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden appeared determined Tuesday to return to the negotiating table with Sen. Joe Manchin, the holdout Democrat who effectively tanked the party's signature \$2 trillion domestic policy initiative with his own jarring year-end announcement.

Biden, responding to reporters' questions at the White House, joked that he holds no grudges against the conservative West Virginia senator whose rejection of the social services and climate change bill stunned Washington just days ago. Instead, the president spoke passionately about the families that would benefit from the Democrats' ambitious, if now highly uncertain, plan to pour billions of dollars into child care, health care and other services.

Continued on next page



**TRAITOR
JOE**

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., a centrist Democrat vital to the fate of President Joe Biden's \$3.5 government overhaul, updates reporters about his position on the bill, at the Capitol in Washington, Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021.

Associated Press

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Continued from Front
 "Sen. Manchin and I are going to get something done," Biden said. The president's off-the-cuff remarks constitute his first public statement as Democrats struggle to pick up the pieces from Manchin's Sunday announcement that he would not support the bill, as is. Manchin essentially crushed Biden's sweeping policy measure in the 50-50 Senate, siding with all Republicans who oppose the bill. Biden spoke of the "dignity of a parent" trying to pay the bills, and the assistance millions could receive from the federal government with the legislation. But the Democrats face serious questions over whether the \$2 trillion initiative can be refashioned to win his crucial vote or the party will be saddled with a dev-



President Joe Biden speaks about the COVID-19 response and vaccinations, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021, in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington.

Associated Press

astating defeat. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer was set to assemble Senate Democrats later Tuesday for a private virtual caucus meeting to discuss next steps. Schumer vowed on Monday that the chamber would vote early in the new

year on Biden's "Build Back Better Act" as it now stands so every senator "has the opportunity to make their position known on the Senate floor, not just on television." That was a biting reference to Manchin's sudden TV announcement against the bill on Sunday.

But Manchin and his party are so far apart, his relationships so bruised after months of failed talks, it's unclear how they even get back to the negotiating table, let alone revive the sprawling more than 2,100-page social services and climate change bill. Biden and Manchin spoke later Sunday, according to a person familiar with the call, first reported by Politico. It was cordial and respectful, said the person who spoke only on condition of anonymity. "We're going to work like hell to get it done," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki, repeating the phrase several times at a Monday briefing but never saying how. The setback has thrown Biden's signature legislative effort into deep doubt at a critical time, closing out the end of the president's first year and ahead of congressional midterm elections when the Democrats' slim hold on Congress is at risk. Coupled with solid Republican opposition, Manchin's vote is vital on this and other initiatives, including the Democrats' priority voting rights legislation that Schumer also promised would come to an early vote. From the White House, Psaki struck a more conciliatory tone than her weekend hardball reaction to Manchin, saying Biden is a "longtime friend" of the senator and the president is focused on moving forward. Steeped in the politics of a state that Biden lost decisively to Donald Trump, Manchin has little to gain from aligning too closely with fellow Democrats, raising fresh questions over whether he still has a place in the party. In a radio interview Monday, he reiterated his position that the social and

environment bill has far too much government spending — on child care, health care and other programs — without enough restrictions on incomes or work requirements. But the lifelong Democrat was less clear when asked if the party still has room for him — describing himself as "fiscally responsible and socially compassionate." Manchin said: "Now, if there's no Democrats like that then they have to push me wherever they want." After months of negotiations with the White House and Senate staff members as well as Biden and fellow senators, he lashed out at hard-line tactics against him by those he said "just beat the living crap out of people and think they'll be submissive." The next steps remain highly uncertain for the president and his party. Lawmakers assessed their options with Congress on recess for the holiday break. The president's reputation as a seasoned legislator who wants to show the country government can work hangs in the balance along with his proposals. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., a leader of the progressive caucus, spoke with Manchin early Monday, but emerged warning her colleagues the senator was an untrustworthy partner who "went back on his word." Jayapal said Democrats were working with the White House on alternative means of reaching the bill's goals through executive or administrative actions, without legislation. The White House appeared to take interest in Manchin's preference for a reimagined bill that would tackle a few top priorities, for longer duration, rather than the multifaceted and far-reaching House-passed version. □

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Biden administration moves to expand solar power on U.S. land

By **MATTHEW BROWN**

Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — U.S. officials announced approval Tuesday of two solar projects in California and moved to open up public lands in three other Western states to potential solar development, as part of the Biden administration's effort to counter climate change by shifting from fossil fuels. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management approved the Arica and Victory Pass solar projects in Riverside County east of Los Angeles, which combined would generate up to 465 megawatts of electricity, or enough to power about 132,000 homes. Approval of a third solar farm — planned for 500 megawatts and known as Oberon — is expected in coming days, officials said.

The land agency also on Tuesday issued a call to nominate land for development within "solar energy zones" in Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico that combined cover about 140 square miles (360 square kilometers).

The solicitation of interest comes as officials under Democratic President Joe Biden promote renewable wind and solar power on public lands and offshore to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are warming the planet. That's a pronounced change from Republican President Donald Trump's emphasis on coal mining and oil and gas drilling.

Yet the Biden administration was unsuccessful in an attempt to suspend oil and gas sales from public lands and waters, after a judge ordered sales to resume following a lawsuit from Republican-led states. Biden suffered another huge blow to his climate change agenda this week, as opposition from West Virginia Democrat Sen. Joe Manchin tanked the administration's centerpiece climate and social services legislation.

During a Tuesday conference call with reporters, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland did not directly ad-

dress a question about the faltering bill and instead pointed to clean energy provisions in the bipartisan infrastructure bill signed into law last month.

"We fully intend to meet our clean energy goals," Haaland said, adding that the administration was trying to make up lost ground.

"The Trump administration did more than just stall clean energy development over the last few years. At Interior, specifically the Bureau of Land Management, they shuttered offices and undermined long-term agreements," Haaland said. "We are rebuilding that capacity."

The Bureau of Land Management oversees almost a quarter-billion acres of land primarily in Western states.

BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning said officials are currently considering 40 large-scale solar proposals in the West. In early December, the agency issued a draft plan to reduce rents and other fees paid by companies authorized to build wind and solar projects on public lands.

In Nevada, where the federal government owns and manages more than 80% of the state's land, large-scale solar projects have faced opposition from environmentalists concerned about harm to plants and animals in the sun- and windswept deserts.

Developers abandoned plans for what would have been the country's largest solar panel installation earlier this year north of Las Vegas amid concerns from local residents. Environmentalists are fighting another solar project near the Nevada-California border that they claim could harm birds and desert tortoises.

Stone-Manning said solar projects on public lands are being sited to take environmental concerns into account.

The solar development zones were first proposed under the Obama administration, which in 2012 adopted plans to bring utility-scale solar energy projects to public lands in six states:



In this Dec. 11, 2017, file photo, solar arrays line the desert floor of the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone as part of the 179 megawatt Switch Station 1 and Switch Station 2 Solar Projects north of Las Vegas.

Associated Press

Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. Officials to date have identified almost 1,400 square miles (3,500 square kilometers) of public

land for potential leasing for solar power development.

If all that land were developed, the bureau says it could support more than

100 gigawatts of solar power, or enough electricity for 29 million homes. That's roughly equal to total U.S. solar power capacity already in place, with solar production from federal lands currently just a small fraction of that amount.

In November the land bureau awarded solar leases for about 8 square miles (19 square kilometers) of land in Utah's Milford Flats solar zone. Solar leases are expected to be finalized by the end of the month for about 13 square miles (34 square kilometers) of land at several sites in Arizona, officials said.

Solar power on public and private lands accounted for about 3% of total U.S. electricity production in 2020. □

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U.S. population growth at lowest rate in pandemic's 1st year

By **MIKE SCHNEIDER**

U.S. population growth dipped to its lowest rate since the nation's founding during the first year of the pandemic as the coronavirus curtailed immigration, delayed pregnancies and killed hundreds of thousands of U.S. residents, according to figures released Tuesday.

The United States grew by only 0.1%, with an additional 392,665 added to the U.S. population from July 2020 to July 2021, bringing the nation's count to 331.8 million people, according to population estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The U.S. has been experiencing slow population growth for years but the pandemic exacerbated that trend. This past year was the first time since 1937 that the nation's population grew by less than 1 million people.

"I was expecting low growth but nothing this low," said William Frey, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's metropolitan policy program, Brookings Metro. "It tells us that this pandemic has had a huge impact on us in all kinds of ways, and now demography."

Once there's a handle on the pandemic, the U.S. may eventually see a decrease in deaths, but pop-



Light afternoon traffic flows in downtown Dallas, Aug. 12, 2021.

Associated Press

ulation growth likely won't bounce back to what it has been in years past because of fewer births. That will increase the need for immigration by younger workers whose taxes can support programs such as Social Security, Frey said.

"We have an aging population and that means fewer women in child-bearing ages," Frey said. "We see younger people putting off having children and they're going to have fewer children."

The population estimates are derived from calculat-

ing the number of births, deaths and migration in the U.S. For the first time, international migration surpassed natural increases that come from births outnumbering deaths. There was a net increase of nearly 245,000 residents from international migration but only about 148,000 from new births outnumbering deaths.

International migration dropped by about half from the previous year because of COVID-19 restrictions, such as borders being closed for nonessential

travel and the closure of many consulates abroad where visas are issued. As recently as 2016, the U.S. had a net increase of more than 1 million international migrants. In more than two dozen states, most notably Florida, deaths outnumbered births. Deaths exceeded births in Florida by more than 45,000 people, but the state's saving grace was a migration gain of more than 259,000 people, the nation's highest.

University of New Hampshire demographer Kenneth Johnson described

the decline in the United States' natural population increase as "stunning," saying it was the smallest spread of births over deaths in more than 80 years.

"Of course most of this is COVID, but not all of it," Johnson said. "U.S. natural increase was already at a low ebb prior to COVID with the fertility rate hitting a new record low each year and deaths steadily rising due to the population aging."

Between 2020 and 2021, 33 states saw population increases, primarily through domestic migration, while 17 states and the District of Columbia lost population.

States in the Mountain West saw the biggest year-over-year growth rate, with Idaho growing by almost 3%, and Utah and Montana each seeing population increases of 1.7%. The District of Columbia lost 2.9% of its population, while New York and Illinois lost 1.6% and 0.9% of their populations, respectively. In pure numbers, California had the greatest net population loss of any state from people leaving: almost 353,000. While the pandemic gave some people the option of working remotely, data released last month by the Census Bureau shows there was no great migration in the U.S. because of it. □

Drought-stricken Las Vegas proposes grass ban for new homes



In this April 9, 2021, file photo, traffic passes a grassy landscape on Green Valley Parkway in suburban Henderson, Nev.

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Grassy yards would be banned at all new housing and commercial developments in the Las Vegas metro area

as officials try to expand water use limitations and the region prepares for a hotter and drier future.

The Southern Nevada

Water Authority passed resolutions on Monday to prohibit the yards and the use of evaporative cooling machines, also known as "swamp coolers," at the new developments. Swamp coolers are used by many people instead of traditional air conditioners, but use more water.

The moves build on current limitations for water use in the Las Vegas region, which is undergoing strong growth. They must be approved by local governments to go into effect.

"We're taking some steps that I'm unaware of having any precedent," Southern Nevada Water Authority General Manager John

Entsminger told the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

The new measures expand on water-use limits already adopted in the Las Vegas region — including a ban on front yard grass, a prohibition on grass being planted in more than half of a backyard and a ban on "non-functional" grass in office parks, street medians and entrances to communities that have homeowner's associations.

Officials have enacted the measures because of widespread acknowledgement that the region will soon have less water to provide to homes, businesses and farms and so development for anticipated population

growth can be accommodated. Grass can still be planted at schools, parks, cemeteries, golf courses and in existing housing developments.

Lobbyists for developers and commercial real estate opposed the new limits proposed by the water authority, arguing they needed more study.

Southern Nevada, which includes the Las Vegas region, relies on the over-tapped Colorado River for about 90% of its water supply. California has implemented some similar limits on grass and water consumption and Arizona has paid farmers to fallow fields. □

Putin blames West for tensions, demands security guarantees

By DASHA LITVINOVA
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Russian president on Tuesday reiterated his demand for guarantees from the U.S. and its allies that NATO will not expand eastwards, blaming the West for "tensions that are building up in Europe."

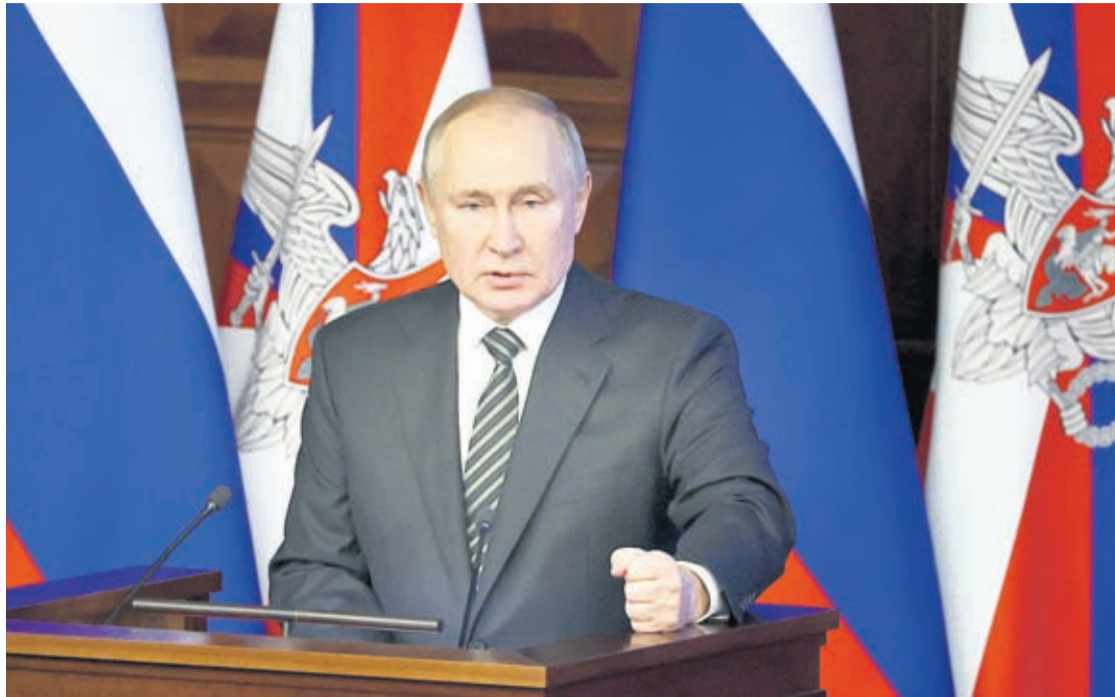
Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech at a meeting with Russia's top military brass came just days after Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back the alliance's military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe.

The demands — contained in a proposed Russia-U.S. security treaty and a security agreement between Moscow and NATO — were drafted amid soaring tensions over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine that has stoked fears of a possible invasion. Russia has denied it has plans to attack its neighbor but pressed for legal guarantees that would rule out NATO expansion and weapons deployment there.

Putin charged Tuesday that if U.S. and NATO missile systems appear in Ukraine, it will take those missiles only minutes to reach Moscow. "For us, it is the most serious challenge — a challenge to our security," he said, adding that this is why the Kremlin needs "long-term, legally binding guarantees" from the West, as opposed to "verbal assurances, words and promises" that Moscow can't trust.

Putin noted that NATO has expanded eastward since the late 1990s while giving assurances that Russia's worries were groundless.

"What is happening now, tensions that are building up in Europe, is their (U.S. and NATO's) fault every step of the way," the Russian leader said. "Russia has been forced to respond at every step. The situation kept worsening and worsening, deteriorating and deteriorating. And here we are today, in a situation



Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses an extended meeting of the Russian Defense Ministry Board at the National Defense Control Center in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Associated Press

when we're forced to resolve it somehow."

Russia's relations with the U.S. sank to post-Cold War lows after it annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and backed a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine that still controls territory there. Tensions reignited in recent weeks after Moscow massed tens of thousands of troops near Ukraine's border.

Putin has pressed the West for guarantees that NATO will not expand to Ukraine or deploy its forces there and raised the issue during a video call with U.S. President Joe Biden two weeks ago.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu charged Tuesday that more than 120 staff of U.S. private military companies are currently operating in two villages in war-torn eastern Ukraine, training Ukrainian troops and setting up firing positions in residential buildings and different facilities. Putin said the U.S. "should understand we have nowhere to retreat."

"What they are now trying to do and plan to do at Ukraine's territory, it's not thousands of kilometers away, it's happening right at the doorstep of our house," he said.

Putin added that Moscow hoped "constructive, meaningful talks with a vis-

ible end result — and within a certain time frame — that would ensure equal security for all."

"Armed conflicts, bloodshed is not our choice, and we don't want such developments. We want to resolve issues by political and diplomatic means," Putin said.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Karen Donfried, the

top U.S. diplomat for Europe, said at a briefing Tuesday that Washington is "prepared to discuss those proposals that Russia put on the table."

"There are some things we're prepared to work on, and we do believe there is merit in having discussion," Donfried told reporters after a visit to Kyiv, Moscow and Brussels.

"There are other things in those documents that the Russians know will be unacceptable," she added, without specifying which ones.

Donfried said bilateral U.S.-Russia meetings are likely to happen in January, and talks within NATO-Russia Council, as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, are likely to see movement in January as well.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday that he intends to call a new meeting of the NATO-Russia Council as soon as possible in the New Year.

"Any dialogue with Russia needs to be based on the core principles of European security and to address NATO's concerns about Russia's actions. And it needs to take place in consultation with NATO's European partners, including with Ukraine," Stoltenberg said.

On Tuesday evening, Putin talked about Russia's proposals in phone calls with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. □

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Philippine governor warns of looting without typhoon aid

MANILA, Philippines (AP) —

The governor of a central Philippine province devastated last week by Typhoon Rai pleaded on radio Tuesday for the government to quickly send food and other aid, warning that without outside help, army troops and police would have to be deployed to prevent looting because of growing hunger.

Governor Arthur Yap of Bohol province said he could no longer provide rice and other food aid after his contingency fund ran out and that many of the 1.2 million people in his island province, which remained without power and cell-phone service five days after the typhoon struck, have become increasingly desperate.

The most powerful typhoon to hit the Philippine archipelago this year left at least 375 dead and more than 50 missing, mostly in the central region, including nearly 100 dead in Bohol, according to officials.

President Rodrigo Duterte visited Bohol over the weekend to see the extensive devastation. Yap said the government's social welfare department promised to send 35,000 food packs, an inadequate amount for



In this photo provided by Greenpeace, damaged homes due to Typhoon Rai lie along a coastal village in Surigao City, southern Philippines Monday Dec. 20, 2021.

Associated Press

the province's 375,000 families, but even those have not yet arrived.

In an interview on DZBB radio network, Yap thanked Duterte for visiting his province but said, "If you would not send money for food, you should send soldiers and police, because if not, lootings will break out here."

Some looting mostly of small merchandise stores have occurred, Yap said, adding that the situation remained under control. But he warned that the looting could worsen if people, especially in hard-hit island municipalities, grow more desperate. People cannot withdraw money from banks without cellphone

connections and power, and fuel and water shortages have also sparked long queues, he said. The national police said widespread looting was not a problem in typhoon-ravaged regions and added that they were ready to deal with any lawlessness. Typhoon Rai packed sustained winds of 195 kilo-

meters (121 miles) per hour with gusts of up to 270 kph (168 mph) at its most lethal point before blowing out into the South China Sea on Friday.

At least 375 people were killed, mostly by falling trees and in flash floods, with 56 others missing and 500 injured, according to the national police. But the toll may still increase as emergency crews restore communications and power to more towns and villages.

Nearly a million people were lashed by the typhoon, including more than 400,000 who had to be moved to emergency shelters as the typhoon approached. Some have begun to return home but others either lost their houses entirely or need to do major repairs.

Emergency crews were working to restore electricity in 227 cities and towns, officials said Monday, adding that power had been restored in only 21 areas so far. Cellphone connections have been restored in at least 106 of more than 130 cities and towns. Two local airports remained closed Monday except for emergency flights, but most others have reopened, the civil aviation agency said. □

Japan hangs 3 in first use of capital punishment in 2 years



Justice Minister Yoshihisa Furukawa speaks regarding the executions during a press conference at his ministry in Tokyo, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021.

Associated Press

By MARI YAMAGUCHI

Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan

hanged three death-row inmates on Tuesday, its first executions in two years, amid growing criticism by human rights groups of the country's use of the death penalty.

One of the three, Yasutaka Fujishiro, was convicted of killing seven people and setting fire to their house in 2004, while the other two, Tomoaki Takanezawa and Mitsunori Onogawa, were convicted in the 2003 killings of two pinball parlor employees.

Executions are carried out in high secrecy in Japan, where prisoners are not informed of their fate until the morning they are hanged. Since 2007, Japan has begun disclosing the names of those executed and some details of their

crimes, but information is still limited.

Justice Minister Yoshihisa Furukawa said at a news conference that the three had committed "extremely ghastly" crimes and the punishment was appropriate.

Furukawa declined to comment on the timing of the executions, often carried out during the year-end holiday season when parliament is in recess, which opponents say is an attempt by the government to reduce criticism. Japan's parliament had its final session of the year on Tuesday.

"As justice minister, I authorized their executions after giving extremely careful considerations again and again," Furukawa said.

Japan now has 107 people on death row at detention centers, instead of regular prisons.

It has maintained the death penalty despite growing international criticism, saying the punishment is needed to take into consideration the victims' feelings and as a deterrence for heinous crime.

Japan and the U.S. are the only two countries in the Group of Seven industrialized nations that use capital punishment. A survey by the Japanese government showed an overwhelming majority of the public supports executions, Furukawa said.

He defended the short notice given to inmates about to be executed, citing a "serious mental impact" on

them if they learn their fate way in advance.

Two death-row inmates recently filed a lawsuit against the government saying the system causes psychological distress and seeking compensation over mental suffering from living in uncertainty until the last day of their lives.

Most executions are also carried out long after sentencing.

The executions were the first since Dec. 26, 2019, when a Chinese citizen convicted in the 2003 killing of a family of four in Fukuoka was put to death. He was one of three hanged that year. In 2018, Japan executed 15, including 13 Aum Shinrikyo cult members convicted in a deadly 1995 nerve gas attack on Tokyo's subways. □



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Mexico sees seizures of meth, fentanyl soar since 2019

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexican drug cartels are turning to bigger, more productive labs to churn out increasing quantities of synthetic drugs like meth and fentanyl, according to seizure figures issued Monday by the country's Defense Department. The defense secretary, Gen. Luis Crescencio Sandoval, acknowledged there has been a huge shift by Mexican cartels away from naturally grown drugs like opium and marijuana, where seizures and crop eradication has fallen. But he said seizures of the synthetic opioid fentanyl soared 525% in the first three years of the current administration, which took office Dec. 1, 2018, compared to the previous three years. Law enforce-

ment seized 1,232 pounds (559 kilograms) of fentanyl in 2016-2018 and 7,710 pounds (3,497 kilograms) in 2019-2021. Part of that increase was due to increased overall use of fentanyl, which Mexican cartels import from China and then press into pills or mix into other drugs. "There was a change in consumption, there was a change in drug markets due to the ease of producing synthetic drugs," Sandoval said. For example, cartels no longer have to pay farmers to grow opium poppies and painstakingly collect the opium past that oozes from the bulbs. The change was reflected in a drop of more than 50% in the amount of opium poppy fields destroyed in



Defense Secretary Luis Crescencio Sandoval, left, and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador salute during an event marking Army Day at the Zocalo in Mexico City, Feb. 19, 2020.
Associated Press

the last three years. And with legalization of pot in many U.S. states, eradication of marijuana fields in Mexico also dropped by about half. Seizures of methamphet-

amines, meanwhile, more than doubled. Meth seizures rose from 120,100 pounds (54,521 kilograms) in 2016-2018 to almost 275,000 pounds (124,735 kilograms) in the last three

years, an increase of 128%. Mexican cartels are increasingly turning to huge, industrial-scale labs to churn out synthetic drugs. Sandoval said the number of drug labs raided fell from 287 in 2016-2018 to 203 over the last three years. But those that were detected were bigger, he added. "The laboratories that have been discovered or seized in this administration have had larger capacities, which has allowed us to seize a larger quantity of methamphetamine products," Sandoval said. Mexico's synthetic drug boom was illustrated last week when a trucker from Mexico was arrested after trying to smuggle record-breaking amounts of meth and fentanyl into the U.S. □

Greece to extend border wall to stop migrants, wants EU help

By **DEREK GATOPOULOS**
Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Greece says it will renew a request for European Union funds in 2022 to extend a border wall along its frontier with Turkey and promised to expand a powerful

surveillance network aimed at stopping migrants entering the country illegally. A public order minister, Takis Theodorikakos, told a parliamentary committee that Greece expects some countries bordering the EU to continue to exploit mi-

gration to exert political pressure on member states, citing the recent crisis in Belarus on its border with Poland and other EU members.

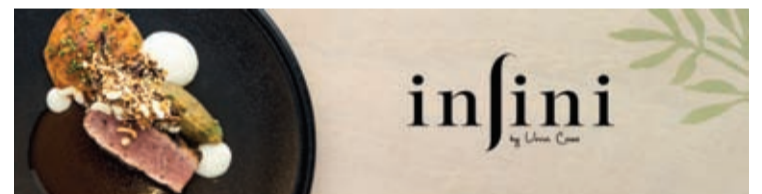
"We have every reason to expect that these kinds of threats will continue," he said during the parliamentary briefing held Friday and made public Monday. Greece's center-right government has toughened the country's migration policy and recently completed a 26-kilometer (16-mile) extension of a steel border wall to make the barrier span 38 kilometers (24 miles).

"We believe the security on our own borders is linked to the security of the EU," Theodorikakos said, adding that border walls and fences are normally funded by national governments. □



In this Friday, May 21, 2021, policemen patrol alongside a steel wall at Evros river, near the village of Poros, at the Greek - Turkish border, Greece.

Associated Press



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Omicron variant detected in Aruba

ORANJESTAD - On December 20, 2020, the Government of Aruba and the Crisis Team provided an update on the Covid situation in Aruba in the week leading to Christmas.

Prime Minister Evelyn Wever-Croes stated that recently the Omicron variant was detected in Aruba, which is considered the start of the 5th wave. On December 16, some tests were conducted, and on December 19, the authorities confirmed the Omicron variant. The omicron cases entailed travelers to Aruba and locals with no recent travel history. Hence, the Omicron variant is present in Aruba and

spreading among the community. The Prime Minister stated that the current protocols are in place. According to the Crisis Team, these are enough to mitigate the current situation. However, we must stay focused and constantly monitor the situation. If deemed necessary, they will tighten up the measures.

"Aruba has been preparing for the possible 5th wave for a while. That is why these measures have been put in place early. The number of positive cases is increasing but is not out of control. The authorities are now urging everyone to be extra cautious



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during these days. The local authorities are concerned but see no reason for panic. Aruba is well prepared. Aruba is recovering, and we do not want to affect this recovery process. That is why they urge everyone to vaccinate, use face-mask, keep social distance and apply the hygiene protocols. "We are battling an invisible enemy, but we have a weapon to fight this; our discipline", the Prime Minister stated.

Covid Status:

There are currently 284 active cases. 191 are residents and 93 non-residents. 180 deceased. There are 10 persons hospitalized in Aruba of which 8 are in ICU. Due to lack of staff at the hospital they have to send patients over to Colombia for treatment. There are currently 6 persons at the ICU in Colombia.

The measures are as follows:

- Curfew: Eliminated.
- Closing Time: 1:00 am for all business for the exception of Casino's which can stay open till 2:00 am
- Restaurants: Max. 8 people per table.
- Area Ban 7:00 pm - 5:00 am
- Nightlife: Dancing is not permitted
- Entertainment: Max 5 musicians on stage.
- Gathering Ban: Max. 6 people.

The following measures remain applicable:

- Masks: Use of masks is mandatory inside at all establishments.
- Alcohol: Ban of alcohol on public roads: 24 hours.
- Social Distancing: Continue maintaining social distance. □

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Aruba to me..... Christmas Edition

ORANJESTAD — You are here for Christmas or New Year and we would like to portrait you! Send a Christmas and Happy New Year greeting to your loved ones, friends or colleagues back home.

Complete the sentence: Holiday Greeting from Merry Aruba to

Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish this between December 22nd and 31st. Isn't that a special way to show your loved ones that even though you are far apart you are still close at heart everyday.

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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a holiday greeting



from **Shannon** and her husband who are a Dutch native couple, both lawyers and new found fans of Aruba.

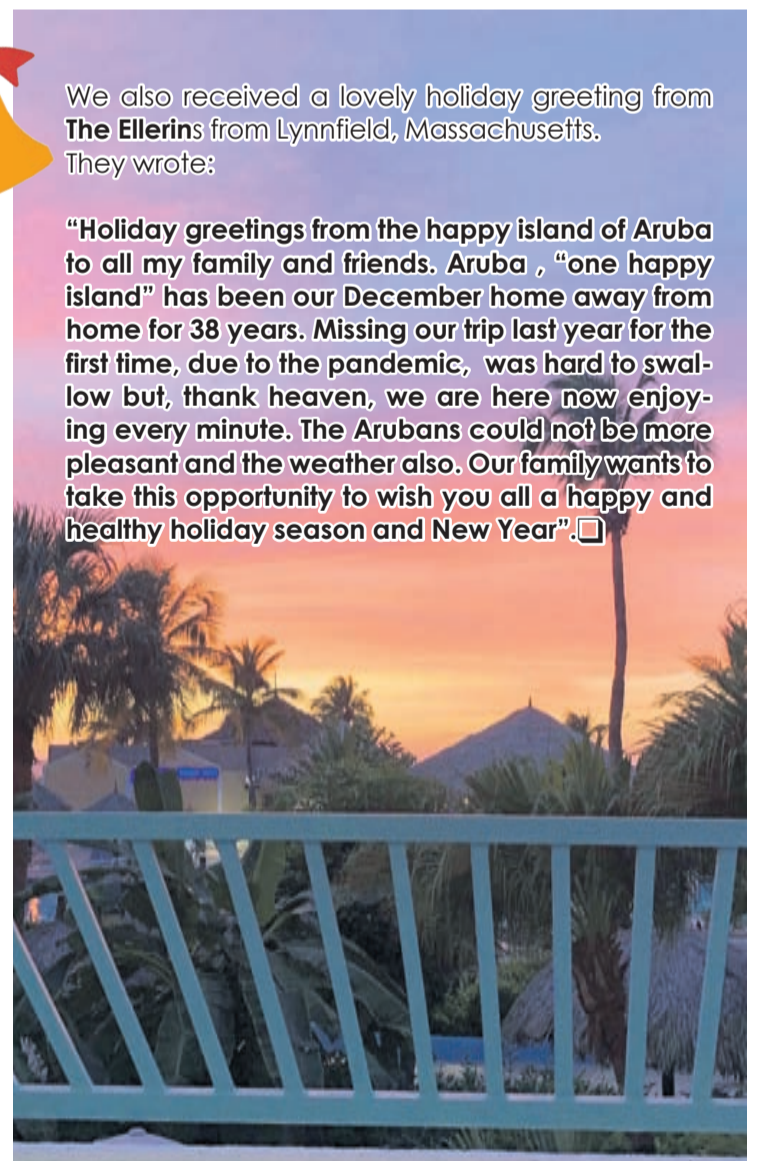
They wrote:

"Holiday greetings from merry Aruba to all our friends, family and colleagues in the Netherlands! After the recent start of another hard lockdown over there, we feel for you all and hope you find a way to enjoy the love and spirit of the holiday despite of everything. Life will get better some day and until then we will make lemonade together (when life gives you lemons..)".



We also received a lovely holiday greeting from **The Ellerins** from Lynnfield, Massachusetts. They wrote:

"Holiday greetings from the happy island of Aruba to all my family and friends. Aruba , "one happy island" has been our December home away from home for 38 years. Missing our trip last year for the first time, due to the pandemic, was hard to swallow but, thank heaven, we are here now enjoying every minute. The Arubans could not be more pleasant and the weather also. Our family wants to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and healthy holiday season and New Year".





Elliott (Lefty) Loonstra representing Aruba and making history at the 2021 9th World Para Taekwondo Championships in Istanbul, Turkey

ORANJESTAD — The Para Taekwondo World Championship was held in Istanbul, Turkey with the participation of 250 athletes from 41 nations, where Elliott Loonstra once again made history in the world as well as for Aruba in this important competition, obtaining 5th place out of 29 competitors.

After the 2020 +1 Tokyo Paralympic Games, the competition rules were updated unifying 3 sports-classes in one, in addition to the change of weights from 3 to 5 for each gender. These changes were also approved for the next 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. These new changes increases the quota to 120 athletes from 72 as it was at the successful 2020 +1 Tokyo Paralympic Games, where Taekwondo debuted as the second combat sport and Elliott was the only athlete to represent Aruba.

The competition day for Elliott Loonstra was on December 12, 2021, Men Sport Class K44 -80 Kg, in which there were 29 athletes from 16 nations com-



peting for the podium.

The first match was with Hancik Kristijan from Serbia in round of 32. Elliott managed to dominate the match winning 4 to 0 going to the next round of 16 where he was up against he representative of Uzbekistan Asadbek Toshtemirov, an athlete with experience in an exciting match until the last 30 seconds of the total 5 minutes of the match, where Aruba trailed by one point, but Elliott Loonstra was able to improve the score by finishing with a tight 9-7

result in Loonstra's favor, thus catapulting him to the quarter-finals, very close to the dreamed world podium.

Being in the quarterfinals he met the Russian Magomedzagir Isaldibirov 3 (third) in the world and 5th in the last 2020 +1 Tokyo Paralympic Games, who by ranking did not need to fight in the elimination round going directly to round 16. In other words, he had more rest having one less fight than Elliott in the competition. The very experienced Russian para

athlete, in competition since 2017 with very good technique and strong, presented himself as a serious opponent. In the first minutes of the fight it was very equal, since the proposed strategy gave results canceling the turning techniques of Magomedzagir. Already at halftime and after a clash between Elliott and the Russian, it was noticeable that the latter was in pain in one knee giving hope to Aruba in going to the semifinals with a guaranteed medal, but after a time-out requested by the Russian coach, Isaldibirov recovered and began to increase a difference on the scoreboard. With

30 seconds remaining in the fight, Elliott Loonstra went in with all his energy and courage with a flurry of techniques that in the end were not enough to beat the Russian. The fight ended at 19-8. At the end of the day the Russian Magomedzagir Isaldibirov became the world champion proving that he is a formidable athlete.

The 2021 9th World Para Taekwondo Championship was Elliott (Lefty) Loonstra's second appearance, his first one being in 2019 and ranking 17th. It is an incredible improvement in the 2021 edition, ranking 5th out of 29 athletes and Aruba ranking 18th out of 41 countries in the team standings table.

The Aruba Paralympic Committee congratulates Elliott Loonstra and his coach Luciano Mazzeo for this excellent result in their first event on the way to the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. A profound thank you to the Loonstra Family, especially Jean and Andre for their unconditional support as well as to the people of Aruba for the constant support to our Para Taekwondo and Paralympic Athlete. □

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Millennial Money: Now is the time to build your credit

By COLIN BERESFORD of NerdWallet

Sooner than you may realize, your credit score will start to matter.

A solid credit score can be the difference between qualifying for an apartment or a low-interest car loan or missing out. So to have credit ready when you need it, the time to start building a good and lengthy credit history is now.

There's more than one way to build credit, and it could be as simple as reporting your ongoing bill payments to the major credit bureaus. But keep in mind: Building credit takes diligence, particularly since missing payments can hurt your score for years to come.

WHAT IS CREDIT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Your credit score is a number that typically ranges between 300 and 850 and is calculated based on how reliably you've paid past debts, such as credit card bills. Lenders use your credit score to predict how likely you will repay debt.

Your credit score helps determine the loans you can receive, the interest you'll be charged, the credit cards you can qualify for and the properties you can rent. An employer can even check your credit history. Having a good credit score can save you money later on, mainly through lower interest rates when you secure a loan.

If you're starting with no credit history, you aren't alone. In the U.S., nearly 40% of people between



A pedestrian walks down South Broad Street in Philadelphia, Feb. 8, 2019.

Associated Press

the ages of 20 and 24 have little to no credit history to generate a score, according to the Consumer Finance and Protection Bureau. Unfortunately, the same is true for roughly 20% of the population.

Building your credit might seem overwhelming if you haven't thought about it before, but there are many strategies to employ, even if you're just beginning. Start by establishing good habits with managing debt, such as not taking on more debt than you can afford, says Brittany Mollica, a certified financial planner based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Missing payments will damage your score and can become a burden when you need to borrow money in the future.

"Getting in good habits of

always paying your bills is really important," Mollica says. "You don't want to have to be climbing out of a hole of all sorts of credit card debt that you've piled up, especially starting out early on."

CREDIT CARDS — AND ALTERNATIVE CARDS

Credit cards can be a great tool to establish credit, but they can also damage your score if you take on more debt than you can handle.

If a parent or another trusted person in your life has a high credit limit and a long history of making timely payments, you could become an authorized user on their account and benefit from their good credit. This is one of the easiest ways to lengthen your credit history, says Blaine

Thiederman, a certified financial planner in Arvada, Colorado.

Becoming an authorized user will also impact your credit utilization rate, or the amount of money you owe to lenders divided by the total credit available to you, which can help your credit score.

If you have your own income, you can apply for a credit card when you're 18 years old; otherwise, you have to wait until you are 21. A secured credit card is typically the best credit card to start with. A cash deposit backs these cards, and since the credit card company can take that deposit if you miss payments, people with short or poor credit histories can qualify.

The deposit you have to

make for a secured credit card could be a burden, and if that's the case, an alternative card might be better for you. These cards use income and bank account information to determine your creditworthiness rather than your credit score.

MONTHLY BILLS

If you live independently, payments for rent, utilities and phone bills can all be reported to credit bureaus. So paying those bills can build your credit if they're on time and you have them reported.

Unlike credit card payments, these payments aren't reported automatically and can require a third-party service, such as Experian Boost or UltraFICO, to make the credit bureaus aware of your payments.

Remember, these services sometimes require a fee and reporting your bill payments may not always impact your credit score; instead, they may just appear on your credit report.

LOANS

Making regular payments on loans can also help you build your credit. And even if you don't have any credit history, some loans are available. Credit-builder loans rely on income rather than credit for approval. If you're approved, the loan sits in a bank account and becomes available once you pay it off. Your monthly payments are reported to the major credit bureaus. Student loans are another loan you can use to build your credit when you're just starting. □

U.S. to landlords, lenders: heed pro-military housing rules

The Department of Justice and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau are warning mortgage servicers and landlords to heed rules meant to protect members of the U.S. military against foreclosure, eviction and other potential housing-related financial hardships during the pandemic.

The move, announced Monday, comes as forbearance programs put in place in the early weeks of the pandemic last year to allow homeowners to hit pause on their

mortgage payments are set to expire at the end of the month.

The Department of Justice also said it has received complaints from servicemembers and veterans who ran into problems after entering into a COVID-19 hardship mortgage forbearance program, including being reported as delinquent borrowers for not making timely payments and being required to make lump sum payments to reinstate their home loans. The complaints are being re-

viewed by the CFPB.

All told, roughly 7.6 million homeowners entered forbearance during the pandemic, according to the DOJ. A majority of borrowers have resumed making their mortgage payments, but roughly 1.25 million others, many military personnel or veterans, remain in forbearance programs about to expire, the government said.

Members of the military have legal protections established so they are free to comply with their service

requirements, such as a potentially lengthy deployment overseas. Among the protections: mortgage servicers, which manage payment collection on home loans, are not allowed to foreclose on or evict certain servicemembers or their families without a court order.

The DOJ and the CFPB's letter to landlords focused on reminding them of the legal protections that apply to military tenants, including rules that make it possible for them to terminate their lease early. □

CROSSWORD

By **THOMAS JOSEPH**

- ACROSS** 46 Santa's
1 Christmas transport trim
7 "...Bearing gifts we traverse —"
11 Baltimore player
12 Metropolis
13 Meal
14 Christmas symbol
15 Save
17 Pert talk
20 Small error
23 Peach center
24 "Take it easy, bro!"
26 "Xanadu" group
27 Like jazz cats
28 French friend
29 Sweet fruit drinks
31 Guest's bed
32 Little kids
33 Vast expanses
34 Like Shakespeare's sonnets
37 Charged particles
39 "— Fideles"
43 Olympics sled
44 Warn while driving
45 Santa keeps one

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Y	A	W	N	S	T	O	A	S	T	

Yesterday's answer

- 19 They're hung at Christmastime
21 Pago Pago setting
22 Highway ramps
24 Deep ravine
25 That woman
30 Social service
33 Play part
35 Scrooge cries
36 Revered one
37 Under the weather
38 Arles answer
40 Enjoy Aspen
41 Gift attachment
42 Ordinal number ending

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
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13						14				
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37	38					39		40	41	42
43						44				
45						46				

12-22

AXYDLBAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-22

CRYPTOQUOTE

HIATEPZJE TE J EQJENK YNA
DTKUBTKX PIQ YTAQ YNA
INEOTPBTPW TK PIQ IJBB.
PIQ XQKTJB YBJZQ NY
HIJATPW TK PIQ IQJAP.

— CJEITKXPNK TAGTKX
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: NOTHING IS CHEAP THAT IS SUPERFLUOUS, FOR WHAT ONE DOES NOT NEED IS DEAR AT A PENNY. PLUTARCH

EXPLAINER: Why Elizabeth Holmes' trial hinges on intent



Elizabeth Holmes walks into federal court in San Jose, Calif., Friday, Dec. 17, 2021.

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — The high-profile trial of former Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes boils down to a single question: Did she cover up defects in her startup's blood-testing technology to rip off investors while potentially endangering the lives of unwitting patients? Federal prosecutors charged Holmes, 37, with 11 felony counts of fraud and conspiracy in 2018 after Theranos collapsed under the weight of her bogus

boasts about its technological prowess. She repeatedly claimed that Theranos had a new way to scan for hundreds of diseases and health problems using just a few drops of blood taken with a finger prick. That would have been a dramatic change from the conventional method of drawing vials of blood via needles inserted into patients' veins, then shipping them off to be tested by Quest Diagnostics or Lab-

corp a process that could take days.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

But it all tuned out to be a mirage.

The web of alleged lies and other deceptive tactics covered in the trial occurred from 2010 to 2015, when, according to prosecutors, Holmes duped investors in her startup while also misleading patients about the accuracy of the company's blood tests.

In defending herself during seven days of often dramatic testimony on the stand, Holmes acknowledged making some bad decisions and mistakes. But she maintained that she never stopped believing Theranos was on the verge of a breakthrough that could redefine health care. Holmes also insinuated that she had been manipulated and deceived by her former lover, Sunny Balwani. Holmes testified that Balwani, who she secretly lived with while he was Theranos' chief operating officer from 2009 to 2016, let her down by failing to fix the laboratory problems that he had promised to fix and, in the most dramatic testimony of the trial, alleged he had turned her into his pawn through a long-running pattern of abuse while exerting control over her diet, sleeping habits and friendships. □



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'Matrix Resurrections' rewires its programming

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

How deep does the rabbit hole go? Deep enough, it turns out, to accommodate at least four movies, several videogames, a comic and countless pairs of sunglasses.

In the 22 years since the "The Matrix" debuted, it has never left us — or depending on your pill of choice, we have never left it. Despite two largely disappointing sequels, "The Matrix" still hasn't quite gone out of style — neither its long leather jackets nor its sci-fi vision of an illusive reality beyond what's in front of us. It's gotten easier and easier to think maybe Morpheus really was onto something about that whole simulation business.

So when green lines of code again rain down across the screen in the opening of "The Matrix Resurrections," it's a little like a warm bath. If we're going to be stuck inside a simulation, at least we have one with Keanu Reeves.

But much has also changed in the 18 years since the last big-screen chapter, "Matrix: Resolutions." This is the first one directed solely by Lana Wachowski, without her sister Lilly. They both had long resisted the idea of another "Matrix" movie, but the death of their parents left Lana craving the comfort of Neo (Reeves) and Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss), she has said. The movie is dedicated to mom and dad.

And for a long time, "Resurrections" seems to be arguing with itself. Neo is now a dispirited videogame designer, famed for creating the "Matrix" game and struggling to make anything that will capture the same cultural connection. This is maybe not so differ-



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss in a scene from "The Matrix Resurrections."

Associated Press

ent for the Wachowskis, visionary filmmakers whose dense, elaborate fantasies ("Jupiter Ascending," "Cloud Atlas") have sometimes sagged under the weight of their baroque architectures and muddled metaphysics. Even the legacy of "The Matrix" is up for debate in this very self-analytical sequel.

"We kept some kids entertained," shrugs Neo, no longer sounding much like "the one." He's now going by his old identity, Thomas A. Anderson.

A sequel to the game, though, is ordered up by the parent company: Warner Bros., which is the studio behind these movies, too. The meta boardroom scene in which this is dis-

cussed isn't nearly as fresh as the filmmakers seem to think. It's part of the movie's overwrought first half where new levels of reality are opened and occasionally loop back to the first "Matrix." Familiar scenes are spied again, but this time from a different, unclear vantage point. There's a blue-haired hacker shifting between realms named Bugs (Jessica Henwick, a fine addition) and a kind of Morpheus stand-in played by Yahya Abdul-Mateen II. Laurence Fishburne isn't in this one, and it's not hard to spend the film's 148-minute running time lamenting his colossal absence.

There's a lot to process in the movie's first half but a few basic points: Thomas/

Neo is living quietly, dourly in a simulation where he and Trinity (Moss) are strangers to one another. But Neo sees her at a coffee shop ("Simulatte"), and there's a powerful, hard-to-explain connection. Reeves and Moss still have a potent chemistry, and one of the movie's chief charms is the resurrection of the less-seen Moss. But in this warped world, Trinity goes by Tiffany and is married with kids. Her husband, cruelly, is even named Chad. Whatever Neo's disquietude, he's pacified by his therapist (Neil Patrick Harris). This "Matrix" movie isn't feverish with newness like the innovative original but pulls from a later chapter in life: the midlife malaise of feeling like you took a wrong turn somewhere long ago.

Realigning all the layers of truth and illusion takes quite some time in "Resurrections," which Wachowski wrote with David Mitchell and Aleksandar Hemon. The first 90 minutes or so are so overloaded with exposi-

tion and explanation that by the time Jada Pinkett Smith's underground rebel leader Niobe pops up and tells Neo, "We have to talk" — you may find yourself murmuring "Please no" and reaching for the nearest blue pill. A lot of sequels and reboots can be criticized for being undercooked; "Resurrections" suffers more from being overthought.

And yet it's often compelling to watch Wachowski interrogate and reconsider her most beloved creation. This is a kind of personal blockbuster-making seldom made and that, flaws and all, I would take over many more slickly composed, more blatantly corporate products.

More than ever, "The Matrix" plays as an allegory not for analog and digital worlds but something more intimate revolving around despondency and self-realization. In its cocktail of pills, therapy and flights off rooftops, "Resurrections" makes an elaborate science-fiction tapestry of medication, depression and suicide. While Neo and Trinity's heterosexual romance drives the franchise (yes, along with those cool, slow-mo bullets), "The Matrix" is about stepping out of normative existence — saying goodbye to old code, to "Chad" — and being reborn in a rule-less, decidedly queer universe. It's a fitting irony that the climax of "Resurrections" features a menacing speech about "sheeple" from Neil Patrick Harris.

But if defying one's heteronormative programming and entering the Matrix was once a balletic finesse, in "Resurrections" the battle is blunter and the tone less exultant. Personal freedom here requires mounting a defense from an alarming onslaught. In the grim culmination of "Resurrections," Neo and Trinity (no longer Tiffany) flee beneath a chilling deluge of bodies robotically controlled to swarm any anomaly. "The Matrix Resurrections" may be a bumpy ride but it's still a trip. □

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NIL was factor on signing day; how big of one up for debate

By ERIC OLSON

AP College Football Writer

The three-day signing period last week put name, image and likeness in the spotlight, especially with No. 1 national recruit Travis Hunter de-committing from Florida State to sign with second-tier Jackson State. Neither Hunter nor other top recruits said whether NIL compensation had anything to do with their school choices. But coaches say NIL came up in the recruiting cycle, the first since the NCAA cleared the way July 1 for college athletes to cash in on their celebrity. "It's very much discussed and talked about, not necessarily in inducements or anything like that or quid pro quo," Missouri coach Eli Drinkwitz said. "You've got to educate (recruits) on what the opportunities could potentially be or what you're going to do to help somebody increase their personal brands and how are you going to educate them on what their opportunities of NIL could be and would be, should they choose the University of Missouri."

The options to be paid for endorsements and personal branding probably was a major factor in the decisions of some recruits who signed letters of intent last week. Athliance CEO Peter Schoenthal, whose company works with schools and athletes on NIL details, said he doubts it was an overriding one for most.

"I think I would be naïve to say it didn't play a role at all," Schoenthal said. "I think I would be over-speaking if



University of Arkansas commit Patrick Kutas Jr. signs his letter of intent during a signing day event at Christian Brothers High School in Memphis, Tenn., Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021.

Associated Press

I said it was the end all, be all of kids' decisions. I think it was a factor. I think it was a bigger factor than it's going to be in the future, once we're able to show the kids the data."

Schoenthal predicted the breadth of a school's NIL programming — ranging from educating athletes on NIL to boosters and businesses offering opportunities — eventually will become just another thing recruits consider.

"NIL is going to become like facilities. At some point everybody is going to have great facilities," Schoenthal said. "I'd like to think once we get a little more regulation and data points to show the kids, it doesn't matter where you go. It's about how much effort

you put in, how marketable you are and how good you are at getting boosters involved."

Schoenthal said he's wary of the latest trend in NIL: booster collectives pushing the envelope of NCAA pay-for-play rules by pooling money that's directed to athletes in the name of NIL.

A nonprofit called Horns With A Heart announced it would make \$50,000 annual payments to University of Texas offensive linemen starting in August 2022. In return, the linemen must do work on behalf of charities, such as making personal appearances.

After Horns With A Heart was announced Dec. 6, four highly touted linemen pledged to Texas. Two of

them, Kelvin Banks and Cameron Williams, de-committed from Oregon after coach Mario Cristobal left the Ducks to take the Miami job.

Banks, Williams and Malik Agbo, who announced on signing day he would go with the Longhorns, did not return Associated Press messages seeking comment on what role, if any, NIL played in their school choice.

Booster collectives have formed around at least two dozen Power Five schools, and more are on the horizon. Schoenthal said it's crucial for the rules surrounding NIL to be more clearly defined so there's a clear line between earning money for services rendered and pay for play.

According to Opendorse, one of the platforms used by athletes to connect with third parties for money-making ventures, seven male athletes who used Opendorse technology earned \$100,000 or more from NIL from July 1 through Nov. 30. A total of 110 earned more than \$10,000. Opendorse — which works with 570 NCAA schools, most of them Division I — did not break down earnings by sport.

Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy said the NIL landscape might look different on signing day 2022. Right now, he said, it's wide open.

"It's like going down Highway 51 if there was nobody ever there that checked your speed," he said. "Nobody's driving 45. Everybody's gonna be driving 70. I don't drive much past 52 because somebody might give me a ticket. I don't think there's any tickets being handed out right now for this. I think it's out of control."

Schoenthal, who puts together educational programs for the athletes at the 35 schools Athliance works with, said his concern is that recruiters in the first few months of the NIL era have oversold the amount of money that could be made.

"Promises are being made without the ability to back up those promises and if you don't fulfill on those promises, there's no accountability for not meeting the expectation you set as a coach on the recruiting trail," he said. □



Mark Kotsay, of the Oakland Athletics baseball team, poses for a photo Feb. 22, 2017, in Mesa, Ariz.

Associated Press

Former outfielder Mark Kotsay named new manager of Athletics

By JANIE McCAULEY

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — The Oakland Athletics named former outfielder Mark Kotsay their manager Tuesday to replace Bob Melvin, who departed earlier this off-season to manage the San Diego Padres.

Kotsay receives a three-year contract through the 2024 season, the team. That

also includes a club option for the 2025 campaign.

Kotsay is being promoted from third base coach to manage the team for which he played in four of his 17 major league seasons — from 2004-07.

The 46-year-old Kotsay also served a stint as bench coach under Melvin, who came aboard midway

through the 2011 season to replace Bob Geren.

Kotsay will be the sixth A's manager spanning the past 36 years and the 19th manager in Oakland history.

The A's went 86-76 this year for third place in the AL West and missed the playoffs following three straight postseason berths. □

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Woods' results inspire hope, his words offer caution

By DOUG FERGUSON
AP Golf Writer

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The moment offered great hope for the immediate future of Tiger Woods.

Golf had gone all year without his blazing red shirt on Sunday and suddenly it had two of them. Woods and 12-year-old son Charlie, decked out just like Dad, headed down the 18th fairway tied for the lead in the PNC Championship, and for a moment the unthinkable seemed possible.

Winning — no matter that it was a scramble — in his first tournament in the 10 months since a car crash that mangled his right leg? But then Woods missed the green to the right, both chipped too strong trying to hole it for eagle, both missed birdie putts and par was never going to be enough. The championship belt went to John Daly and his college son.

The words asked for restraint.

"No, no, no, no," Woods said with a smile.

The topic was an observation from Matt Kuchar, who played with Woods in the final round and suggested that walking aside, his game and swing looked ready for the PGA Tour.

"I totally disagree. I'm not at that level. I can't compete against these guys right now. No," Woods said.

For those keeping track, that was his fifth "No."

"It's going to take a lot of work to get to where I feel I can compete against these guys and be at a high level," Woods said,



Tiger Woods hugs son Charlie Woods on the 18th green after the second round of the PNC Championship golf tournament, Sunday, Dec. 19, 2021, in Orlando, Fla.

and then he was gone. He at least ended the year on an uplifting note.

This might not seem like much, but it was the 26th consecutive year that Woods played at least one tournament as a pro. That didn't seem likely after images of his crumpled SUV at the bottom of a hill in the Los Angeles suburbs and words like "comminuted open fractures," medical speak for a bone broken in at least three places that broke through the skin.

Woods also has said amputation was on the table. Word on the medical street is the "Tiger Woods of doctors" were on duty when he was brought in. Lucky man. And then 10 months later, he and his son played bogey-free (that was one

of their goals) and had a great time (that was the other goal), finished at 25-under par in 36 holes, made 11 straight birdies and nearly won the tournament.

"The competitive juices, they are never going to go away," Woods said. "This is my environment. This is what I've done my entire life. I'm just so thankful to be able to have this opportunity to do it again."

Golf doesn't often make the front of sports pages, and never in December.

Welcome back, Tiger. And so the next step, naturally, was to wonder when he would return. Woods doesn't know, and neither does Lee Trevino.

The second question is where, another mystery.

Woods is forever linked with the Masters, where he delivered a watershed moment in golf history with his 12-shot victory in 1997 at age 21, and where he returned from four back surgeries to win a fifth green jacket in 2019.

The first round of the 2022 Masters is 107 days away, and Woods said he never took a day off during rehab. So who knows? But walking is a big part of playing, and Woods was in cart at the PNC Championship. Augusta National is the prettiest garden and the toughest walk.

Ian Poulter was contemplating this while watching Woods play on Saturday. Up the steep hill on No. 1, down the hill on No. 2, up the hill on No. 3, down and

then up on No. 4. On and on he went until it was suggested the par-3 12th over Rae's Creek was a fairly easy walk.

"You do have the bridge," Poulter said, grinning because the point had been made.

Southern Hills, the site of the 2022 PGA Championship, is a fairly easy walk, once players get down the massive slope from the first tee, meaning they eventually have to go back up.

The steepest climb at St. Andrews, which is holding the 2022 British Open, is getting out of the pot bunkers (Woods didn't hit into any of them when he won by eight shots as a 24-year-old in 2000).

About all Woods knows concerning his future is that he won't be playing a full schedule ever again. He will have to pick the spots. "And even then," he said, "my body might not cooperate."

Justin Thomas sees more of him than any other player, and he was alongside for the opening round when Woods stuffed a towering 4-iron from 220 yards to 8 feet, and when Woods outdrove the 28-year-old on the 11th hole.

"In terms of hitting shots and all that stuff, he's not that far away," Thomas said. "But in terms of being able to compete and walk 72 holes multiple weeks in a row? Yeah, that's a different story. And he's the only one that can answer that." One answer could be found in his easy smile when it was over. □